

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

Cloyd Harrison, Commissioner
Uintah County Board of Commissioners
152 East 100 North
Vernal, UT 84078

Uintah County, Utah

Response to the Proposed

The Utah National Parks and Public Lands Wilderness Act

OPEN SPACES MAY BE SCARCE ON THE EAST COAST, BUT THEY AREN'T IN UTAH

Utah is **BIG!** 52,696,960 acres -- the states of Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont and West Virginia would fit comfortably within our borders. Uintah County -- at 2,255,207 acres -- would alone accommodate Rhode Island, Delaware and the District of Columbia. However those three states would bring with them 2,255,207 people while Uintah County is home to only 24,500. That is 117 acres for every man, woman and child.

These open spaces are not in danger of being populated either. 91.4% of Uintah County is either federal, state or Indian land. And while we don't live on these lands we do earn our living from these lands.

It is interesting to note that wilderness designation precludes oil, gas and mining development, but that utilization of our public lands for oil, gas and mining does not preclude wilderness. Ten of thousands of acres recently identified by BLM as having wilderness characteristics were previously accessed for mineral extraction in the 50's and 60's. Today the BLM specialists and wilderness advocates look at these lands and say that the "footprint of man is not substantially noticeable." If the arid lands of southern Utah have been reestablished as "wilderness" in less than 40 years with only the work of mother nature, then with the help of modern scientific reclamation practices we could extract resources from these lands and within your lifetime they could be reestablished as "wilderness."

Let's not monkey around with the Act and the instructions to BLM in Section 603 of FLPMA. The BLM did their job in 1980 and made their recommendation for wilderness. It was a public process and followed the law. Now we are seeing many attempts to politically or administratively change the results of that process. It appears to be a breaking of the rules. If Congress wants to change the rules, then rewrite the Act. Otherwise, BLM submitted Utah's proposal for wilderness long ago.

IMPACTS OF WILDERNESS DESIGNATION ON UTAH COUNTY

- **LOCAL ECONOMY**
- **JOB & WAGE LOSSES**

- **SCHOOL DISTRICT REVENUES**
- **TIME & MONEY SPENT ON PROTECTING LOCAL INTERESTS**
- **FEDERAL LANDS MANAGEMENT**
- **WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT**
- **COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS**
- **AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY & GRAZING**

IMPACTS OF WILDERNESS DESIGNATION ON UINTAH COUNTY

- **LOCAL ECONOMY**
 - Wilderness designation would depress the economy of Uintah County.
 - Wilderness designation would limit access to, and development of, resources.
 - Wilderness designation could stifle the upwards of 80% of oil, gas and mining endeavors that occur on public lands.
 - Wilderness designation would curtail historic timbering and ranching operations.
 - Wilderness designation would restrict recreation and tourism opportunities that depend on "multiple-use" on the public lands of Uintah County.
- **JOB & WAGE LOSSES**
 - 1 of every 8 jobs in Uintah County are related to the oil, gas and mining industry.⁽¹⁾
 - \$1 of every \$4 of wages paid in Uintah County are related to the oil, gas and mining industry.⁽²⁾
 - The health of support and service industry jobs and wages rests on the vitality of the "multiple-use" industry occurring on Uintah County's public lands.
 - History has proven that residential foreclosures increase and building permits decline exponentially with decreased resource employment.⁽³⁾
- **SCHOOL DISTRICT REVENUES**
 - Wilderness designation will impact surrounding school trust lands from generating their maximum potential revenues.
 - Any decrease in general economic activities in Uintah County adversely impacts property tax values and likewise property tax revenues which support local schools.⁽⁴⁾
- **TIME & MONEY SPENT ON PROTECTING LOCAL INTERESTS**
 - \$100,000+ is a great deal of money to spend by a rural county who is experiencing a major eroding of its tax base
 - Thousands of hours have been spent on wilderness designation issues by officials, corporate representatives and residents of Uintah County⁽⁵⁾
- **FEDERAL LANDS MANAGEMENT**
 - Abundant opportunities already exist within federal land management practices and protocols that provide complete protection for the various resource values of public lands that do not require congressional involvement.
 - Several areas are already managed in restrictive manners by public land managers in Uintah County.⁽⁶⁾
 - Wilderness is the most restrictive land management perspective of all. Designation will effectively restrict access to valuable resources completely.

• AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY & GRAZING

- Wilderness designation will negatively impact the management of grazing within these areas by restricting maintenance of structures, improvements or construction of facilities and access with motorized equipment.
- Conflicts between wildlife and livestock uses, real or perceived, typically result in administrative findings on behalf of wildlife, often to the extreme detriment of ranching businesses.[\(7\)](#)

• COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES

- The loss of industry impacts the vigor of the central business districts.
- Commercial operations that depend on resource extraction will continue to see profits erode and close shop or move elsewhere.
- Property taxes collected have seen an overall 35% decline. Centrally assessed values have declined by 47.8%. Local assessments have only risen by 16.7%.[\(8\)](#)

• WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT Designation of 2.6 million acres will impact Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' (UDWR) ability to manage Utah's fish and wildlife species by restricting the

- Use of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters for wildlife management purposes;
- Ability to maintain existing guzzlers and other water developments, as well as construct new water developments;
- Ability to conduct large scale vegetation treatments on WSAs and nearby areas;
- Ability to introduce and stock fish and wildlife;
- Administrative access on existing roads for wildlife management purposes;
- Ability to control predators;
- Continuation of recreational activities.[\(9\)](#)

Results of Decreases in Property Values and General Economy

	Percentage Decreases/Dollars Lost				
	1.00%	3.00%	5.00%	7.00%	10.00%
M&O					
WPU	112,159	334,576	556,993	779,410	1,113,986
Fee In Lieu	2,348	7,045	11,741	16,438	23,483
10% of Basic	17,790	53,370	88,951	124,531	177,901
M&O Loss	132,297	394,991	657,685	920,379	1,315,370
Capital Outlay					
Property Tax	45,771	137,312	228,854	320,395	457,708
Fee in Lieu	4,712	14,135	23,559	39,982	47,118
Capital Outlay Loss	50,483	151,447	252,413	353,377	504,826
Recreation					
Property Tax	3,088	9,263	15,438	21,613	30,876

Fee in Lieu	318	954	1,589	2,225	3,179
Recreation Loss	3,406	10,217	17,027	23,838	34,055
TOTAL SCHOOL DISTRICT LOSS	186,186	556,655	927,125	1,297,594	1,954,251
Number of Teachers This Represents	5	15	25	35	50

SUPPLEMENTAL SHEET

Cloyd Harrison, Commissioner
 Uintah County
 152 East 100 North
 Vernal, UT 84078
 (435)781-5383

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Quarterly Economic Newsletter, Eastern Region, Utah Department of Workforce Services, Third Quarter, 1998 - Exhibit A
2. Quarterly Economic Newsletter, Eastern Region, Utah Department of Workforce Services, Third Quarter, 1998 - Exhibit A
3. Uintah County Economic and Demographic Data 1980-1998, Utah Governor's Office of Planning & Budget - Exhibit B
4. Uintah School District, 10/13/99 - Exhibit C
5. Uintah County Commission and Clerk-Auditor's Office, 10/15/99
6. Letter, National Park Service, 10/13/99 - Exhibit D
7. "Grazing Is Important to Uintah County", Thomas Bachtell, 10/15/99 - Exhibit E
8. "Uintah County Taxable Value", Uintah County Clerk-Auditor's Office, 10/13/99 - Exhibit F
9. Letter, State of Utah, Department of Natural Resources, 4/28/99 - Exhibit G

#